



City of Arts & Innovation

# News Release

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## **City of Riverside Will Not Proceed With Plan to Replace Retired Fire Chief**

*City Manager will name an Interim Chief, Conduct Recruitment to Replace Former Chief Earley*

RIVERSIDE, Calif. – The City of Riverside will not proceed with a plan to have three high-ranking Fire Department officials serve rotating three-month terms as Acting Fire Chief. Instead current Acting Chief Mike Esparza will lead the department until City Manager Scott Barber can appoint an Interim Chief and begin a recruitment to replace retired Chief Steve Earley.

Barber made the decision Tuesday after speaking with Earley. In that conversation, both men expressed concerns about the public perception of the plan, which would have enabled the City to utilize Earley's 32+ years of experience in the fire service during much of 2014 while costing the City about \$235,000 less than if Earley had not retired.

"I am committed to ensuring the public has confidence in what we are doing at City Hall," Barber said. "While I personally believe the City would benefit from such an arrangement, the concerns that have been expressed are significant. It would be unwise to move forward with a program that in any way could damage the public's confidence in a City department, especially one involving public safety."

The plan called for Earley, who retired in late December, to earn \$100 per hour – 20 percent less than the \$125 per hour he made as Chief before retiring – and receive no benefits while working as many as 960 hours through June 30 as allowed by state pension law and approximately 40 hours per week from July 1 to Sept. 30.

The arrangement would have given the City and its Acting Chiefs access to Earley's expertise on two especially important issues in 2014 – upcoming negotiations between the City and the Riverside City Firefighters Association and the ongoing review of the countywide emergency medical services system by Riverside County. Earley has been closely involved in both issues in recent years.

However, concerns were voiced publicly regarding whether the City should bring Earley back after his retirement and how the plan might affect the Riverside Fire Department. The Riverside City Firefighters Association voted today (1/7) to oppose the plan.